

Issue Brief: Independent Commissions

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Visiting Committee on Advanced Technology
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Purpose of today's discussion

- VCAT meeting with T. Kassinger, 3/17/04
 - Context: Broad discussion of NIST roles, industry needs, and funding requirements
 - Suggestion: Consider an independent commission to assess NIST's roles and contributions to the economy
 - Point of reference: U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy
- VCAT request: Explore topic further...

Reference points for discussion

- U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy (2004)
 - Joint Congressional / Presidential
 - Economic and environmental policy arenas
- President's Commission on Industrial Competitiveness (1985)
 - Presidential; economic and industrial policy
- V. Bush: *Science—The Endless Frontier* (1945)
 - Expert advisory; science policy
- Metric System Study (1971)
 - Congressional study request; single policy issue

Ocean Commission: Origin and issues

- Origin: Oceans Act of 2000
 - Precedent: Stratton Commission (1966)
 - Provides \$8.5M for Commission work
 - Defines Congressional and Administration terms of reference and responsibilities
- Issues: Change over time in
 - Demographics; coastal population growth
 - Complexity of legal-regulatory framework
 - Economic costs to resource limits and degradation
 - Complexity and scope of environmental threats
 - Technological change; new resource opportunities

Ocean Commission: Scope

- Stewardship and management of ocean resources
 - Protection of life and property
 - Stewardship of ocean and coastal resources
 - Protection of marine environment and prevention of marine pollution
 - Enhancement of maritime commerce
 - Expansion of human knowledge of the marine environment
 - Investments in technology to promote energy and food security
 - Close cooperation among government agencies
 - U.S. leadership in ocean and coastal activities

Ocean Commission:

Approach and recommendations

➤ Approach

- 16 commissioners; diverse, high-level
- Independent science advisory panel

➤ Nearly 200 prelim. recommendations, including

- New National Ocean Policy Framework—National Ocean Council; stronger NOAA role
- At least double federal ocean-related science investment over 5 years, from base of \$650M
- New governmental management structures for coastal zones, offshore uses, water management, fishery management, etc.
- Finance by establishing an Ocean Policy Trust Fund

Commission on Industrial Competitiveness: Origin and issues

➤ Executive Order: June 1983

➤ Issues

- Erosion of “competitive preeminence” over the past decade
- Industrial decline; de-industrialization
- Globalization; international competition; trade deficits
- Recession; unemployment
- Growing federal deficit

Commission on Industrial Competitiveness: Scope

➤ Presidential charge:

- “To identify problems and opportunities for the private sector to transform new knowledge and innovations into commercial products, services, and manufacturing processes”; and
- “To identify policy changes at all levels of Government to improve the private sector’s ability to compete in the international marketplace and to maintain and create opportunities for American workers.”

Commission on Industrial Competitiveness: Approach / Concl.

- President appointed 30 leaders from business, labor, government, and academia. Chair: J. Young, President & CEO, HP
- 32 recommendations; 89 action items
 - R&D / Manufacturing: Science policy; IPR; tax credits; antitrust; regulations...
 - Capital: Federal deficit; monetary & tax policy
 - Human resources: Labor flexibility; adjustment assistance; labor-mgmt relations
 - International trade & marketing: Est. Department of Trade; trade promotion; export financing; etc.

V. Bush: Origins and Issues

- Origin: Presidential request for expert advice
- Issues:
 - Refocusing wartime mobilization of scientific enterprise toward postwar needs
 - Suppression of scientific developments during war
 - Extending public benefits of wartime medical research
 - No prior articulation of governmental role in supporting public and private R&D efforts
 - Developing “scientific talent” that can continue research achievements at “a comparable level”
 - Dislocation of European scientific establishment

V. Bush: Scope, approach, and central recommendation

- Scope: Define role of government in supporting scientific research
- Approach: Four committee reports; led by Bush—Director of the Office of Scientific Research and Development
- Recommendation: Create a new federal agency—the “National Research Foundation”—to advance the national interest in scientific research and scientific education

Metric System Study: Origin and Issues

- Origin: Congressional request to study consequences of alternative legislative approaches to “metrification” (Aug. 1968)
- Issues:
 - Convergence of other industrialized nations on the metric system
 - Embedded costs in existing U.S. system; resistance to transition—esp. among small businesses and consumers

Metric System Study: Approach and results

➤ Approach

- DOC-appointed Metric System Study Panel
- NBS study team
- Extensive hearings and public review

➤ Recommended coordinated national program to adopt metric system within 10 years

- Rational policy position, but unpopular
- Metric Conversion Act of 1975 “contained encouraging words, but no substantial progress toward a metric America”

General observations

➤ Barriers to entry

- Visibility and breadth of policy issues
- Political salience; broad agreement on problem
- Credible executive leadership; balanced participation; broad input

➤ Barriers to effectiveness

- Complexity and salience of issues
- Executive and Legislative interest and commitment at the outset
- Distribution of costs and benefits
- Imperative to change v. viability of status quo

Discussion

- Applicability to NIST?
- Alternatives?